

WESTMINSTER SELECTBOARD SPECIAL BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING

Wednesday, January 4, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.

In person at Westminster, VT Town Hall and remote by FACT TV

Selectboard Present: Jason Perry (Chair), Katrina Hamilton (Clerk), Kevin Hughes (Vice Chair), Craig Allen and Nathan Dugat

Staff Present: Alison Bigwood (Acting Town Manager), Millie Barry (Recording clerk), Chuck Lawrence (Road Foreman)

Others Present: Chip Stearns (NEMRC) and Susan Harlow

1. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30

Information to access a future meeting using a remote connection is available on the Town of Westminster website or by calling the Westminster town hall.

2. New Business – Budget workshop – Chip Stearns presented to the board information in spreadsheet form account numbers, item description, FY22 budget, FY22 actual, FY23 budget, FY23 YTD, FY24 budget and working budget. Each item was numbered 1-283. Mr. Stearns noted if the town grand list remained the same without projecting growth or decline, \$28,861.61 amounted to one penny in the estimated tax rate of 0.7238. Stearns said to keep in mind reducing the budget by \$28,861.61 subtracted a penny from the tax rate as well as adding the same amount added a penny to the tax rate. Stearns added when talking about budget numbers, 'let's not take a lot of time nickel and diming \$500.00' when the target is a big number.' Stearns continued there was one number changed in the general fund for the manager's salary. The proposed number submitted from Mr. Fay was \$94,000.000 including the zoning administrator salary. As Craig Allen commented the manager's salary should be \$73,000.00, the number was changed, adding the difference of \$21,000.00 to the zoning administrator line. Stearns said (in part) at the prior selectboard meeting Ms. Bigwood's salary had not been budgeted but the finance officer's salary of \$56,160.00 (taken from the town's comparative budget report) lists salary equivalent to her projected salary. Stearns noted a discussion/email with the board regarding moving FEMA funds of \$200,000.00 (current year FY2023 surplus) back into the highway fund. If the board made an article and it was authorized by the voters to move \$200,000.00 back in FY2024 to the highway fund this would immediately drop the tax rate. In addition, Stearns said there could be an article for voter approval to move from FY2023 fund balance of FEMA/storm \$200,000.00 back to the highway fund for the purposes of reducing taxes. The board and Stearns discussed Westminster West library FY2022 budget/actual of \$15,400.00. The board agreed to \$15,400.00 for the working budget with voter approval of \$7,700.00.

Craig Allen questioned heating oil FY2023 YTD of \$6,102.39. The board agreed to leave FY2024

budget at \$2,500.00 and investigate how payments (diesel, propane etc. vs heating oil) may have been coded.

Susan Harlow asked if there was money in computer contract services to update the website. Mr. Perry said the board had not lost site of Ms. Harlow's request for funds to update the website.

The board agreed to remove \$4,000.00 expense in budget FY2024 for school merger expense as there would not be further merger expense.

Katrina Hamilton questioned numbers for mapping. Ms. Bigwood said \$4,700.00 (expense) FY2024 budget was an estimate to make tax maps available online. Hamilton questioned if there was adequate revenue to cover \$500.00 maintenance expense for online mapping. Ms. Bigwood believed there was next to no revenue realized for the listers. In answer to Mr. Hughes question regarding lister salaries, Ms. Bigwood said one lister volunteers his services and other listers are not working. Ms. Bigwood agreed with Stearns there is more work done by the listers from February to the spring.

Mr. Hughes said looking at interest earned, he was looking at a factor of 6,800% increase, questioning what the average aggregate over a 12-month period (fiscal year) the town is getting interest, how much money is the average, that they are actually booking as interest versus what the town is getting paid now. Mr. Stearns said there were times when the general fund cash account could drop to less than \$100,000.00, adding there was about 2 million plus or minus at the present time. As an example, taxes would be collected in February and the school would be paid the second half of the amount owed on March 1. He said the 90 days Hughes was looking for would actually be about 55 days. He said there was not a period of sustainable 90 days of free cash because of the nature of paying municipal bills every two weeks.

In discussion with Stearns, Ms. Hamilton believed the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) payment of approximately \$395,000.00 received in November 2022 was the last of the payments to be received for the projects from the storm. Stearns noted in the past the State provided a cash flow spread sheet detailing the FEMA reimbursements. He would like to see an inquiry to the State to find what funds the town has yet (if any) to receive.

He said the recommendation was an article to move \$200,000.00 to the highway fund to reduce the amount to be raised by taxes to be warned as that purpose.

Jason Perry questioned municipal building maintenance noting the town had used \$19,423.95 of \$20,000.00 and knew some of the monies were for the town hall furnace. Ms. Bigwood said the current figure (\$19,423.95) did not include the bills for the recent sewer problem. Perry said the town hall was in need of paint. Mr. Allen believed a plan was needed to budget an additional \$20,000.00 in maintenance costs for the town hall. The board agreed to leave the present amount and to make a capital plan to possibly scrape and paint one side of the building for the next several years.

Mr. Allen questioned FY2023 \$60,000.00 for the Windham County Sheriff noting \$37,210.25 been spent thus far year to date, budget FY2024 was \$60,000.00. He believed there would be questions at town meeting from the voters due to the amount of coverage the sheriff's

department was currently extending to the town versus the amount spent. The board agreed Ms. Bigwood would contact Karen Astley (town manager in Putney) regarding a shared service and invite sheriff Mark Anderson to the January 11, 2023 board meeting and/or talk to Anderson about next year's contract. Ms. Bigwood said the current contract was 20 hours per week for \$60,000.00.

Mr. Allen also questioned the ambulance service FY2023 budget of \$45,000.00, year to date \$21,667.50, budget FY2024 \$45,000.00. Ms. Bigwood said she had not received information from Golden Cross adding Scott Pickup planned to attend a recent selectboard meeting to inquire if Westminster would consider sharing the Brattleboro service with the town of Rockingham at a very increased price. The board agreed Ms. Bigwood would research the current contract and/or reach out to Golden Cross if a new contract was required.

Mr. Allen questioned budget numbers for collecting waste, disposing of waste and waste assessment. The board agreed Ms. Bigwood would research Ruggiero's waste disposal contract regarding length of contract, amounts etc. Mr. Perry will contact Joe Ruggiero to check in regarding changes/increases in service.

Mr. Allen questioned transfer to equipment fund FY2022 of \$145,000.00, FY2023 of 175,000.00, year to date \$213,503.29 believing the overage was a payment of \$43,000.00 not added to the budget. Mr. Allen noted if there was another 10-wheel truck (\$190,000.00 price) purchase in the coming year the line item had to be adjusted to account for the purchase bringing the line item to about \$215,000.00 as there was an additional loan payment of \$43,000.00. Mr. Stearns noted a debt schedule and a plan was to lay out to try and level fund yearly contributions, asking the taxpayers for the same amount yearly while having in reserve each year the difference of what is contributed and monies actually needed for equipment. The funds in reserve cover additional funds required for big ticket items. The board agreed Mr. Lawrence would explain to taxpayers the plan and debt schedule at town meeting. Stearns said the numbers will be adjusted to reflect FY2023 and the FY2024 monies (approximately \$230,000.00) to buy a truck and deficit payment of \$39,000.00 from the current year. The board and Stearns agreed not to do any transfers to the equipment fund and show the deficit in the present year and add \$230,000.00 for a debt payment and new truck in FY2024.

In transfer to retreatment (\$135,000.00) and transfer to bridge fund (\$15,000.00) the transfers have not been to be made for these amounts. The retreatment fund at present is \$166,073.50, adding the annual contribution of \$135,000.00 at the end of June the town could spend the total amount without a deficit. Mr. Lawrence said the price of asphalt changed every 30 days and if the town did not have a paving contract by January 1st it was possible there would not be a contract.

Stearns suggested the town continue to pay Ms. Bigwood out of the town manager salary line noting In FY2023, FY2024 there was a finance officer line. Mr. Allen believed between zoning, finance officer and town manager there were enough funds to cover her position. Stearns questioned FY2024, did the board intend to set amount biweekly for the positions of zoning, finance etc.

In answer to Mr. Allen’s question regarding delinquent property taxes, Stearns said delinquent property taxes, (FY2022 \$195,565.53, FY2023 \$780,210.00, FY2023 year to date \$498,398.04) were booked in the revenue line the day after the second installment. Once they are late and paid after February 10th, the revenue is called delinquent property tax as the tax year is delinquent, but the fiscal year is not over. Taxes that are current are never collected 100%. FY2023 year to date includes amounts from prior years. Mr. Hughes clarified, delinquent taxes are monies that come in at certain times and in the current year the town is collecting monies from prior years.

Stearns confirmed he was working with Ms. Bigwood on the town meeting articles for the warning with the option of an article for \$200,000.00 from the FEMA storm fund balance into FY2024 to contribute to reduce the tax burden.

As Fire District #3 meets January 12th, Stearns hoped there would be word regarding their final budget numbers.

Stearns’ final note, the transfer to the highway would be a one time ability in part as the town had not transferred \$200,000.00 out in FY2022 but that the town was using \$200,000.00 from fund balance in FY2022 (from FEMA storm fund).

Mr. Lawrence, the board and Stearns discussed entries to the garage fund and the reimbursement of Grants in Aid monies. Ms. Bigwood questioned contractual services to the highway fund for FY2023 \$151,675.34. Mr. Lawrence and Stearns will research the contractual expense and when/if grant funds have been received.

Stearns noted, factoring in the one-time \$200,000.00 from FEMA the tax rate, with changes, the anticipated tax rate would be .6746 versus .6750 for prior year adding all contract changes would impact the rate.

3. Executive Session: Ms. Hamilton moved to go into executive session being that premature public knowledge would clearly place the municipality, the public body, a person or persons involved at a substantial disadvantage as outlined in 1 VSA 313 of VT State Statutes. Hughes seconded; motion carried by 5-0 voice vote. The board moved to executive session at 8:35 p.m. The board reconvened regular session at 9:33 p.m., no action was taken.

4. Date of Next Meeting: January 11, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

4. Adjournment: At 9:35 Kevin Hughes motioned to adjourn, Nathan Dugat seconded; meeting adjourned after 5-0 voice vote.

Clerk

Date